

BIG UGLY BILL POURS BILLIONS INTO BORDER & SURVEILLANCE TECH



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As communities decry Trump’s authoritarian moves against migrants, Congress has passed a law approving unprecedented sums for Trump to supercharge the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. These new sums, combined with separate money from the regular budget, could boost the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) overall budget for next year by more than 40 percent, to an all-time high of \$159 billion.

Trump administration officials have said their goal is to detect every time that any person moves across any part of the nation’s 2,000-mile-long southern border. To do that, they want more – and more invasive – digital surveillance tools. These technologies restrict community members’ mobility, contributing to preventable deaths and injuries. By surveilling its targets – disproportionately Indigenous, Black, and dark-skinned Latinx people – they also “create more precise forms of racial and ethnic profiling and discrimination.”¹

While devastating those who live and move through the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, this staggering level of spending on militarization and surveillance will enrich the oligarchs in the tech, military, and prison industries angling for more government contracts to boost their profits. As Acting ICE Director Todd Lyons told industry leaders at this year’s border security expo in Phoenix: “we need to get better at treating this like a business,” explaining he wants to see a deportation process “like (Amazon) Prime, but with human beings.”²

Billions More for Immigration Enforcement & Border Tech



In July, Congress passed the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” (OBBBA) without bipartisan support, pumping an extra \$167 billion into immigration enforcement spending over the next four years.³ Some \$43.8 billion of that is expected to be

allocated for next year.⁴ In terms of funding for border tech, the OBBBA directs \$6.17 billion in border tech spending over the next four years.

This is not the only money Congress will hand the Trump administration for immigration enforcement and border tech. The regular budget appropriations process in Congress is underway for next year, and the House is proposing to give \$11 billion to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and \$19 billion to Customs and Border Protection (CBP)⁵ next year, the highest totals ever. Of those totals, some \$346 million would go towards new border security technology next year.⁶ Not counting the OBBBA amounts, DHS plans to spend almost \$244 million next year on border security infrastructure, including tech.⁷

The Tech that's Being Funded & the Companies that Stand to Profit



Here's a look at some of the key areas where surveillance tech spending is focused, how this would harm border communities, and which corporations are likely to benefit.

COLLECTING & USING OUR BIOMETRIC DATA

ICE agents are using a new facial recognition tool on their phones to identify people. The tool, called Mobile Fortify, compares photos of people taken by ICE agents "in the field" with photos stored in CBP systems that photograph people as they enter or exit the U.S. via land or airports.⁸ The tool can identify people ICE doesn't yet know.



CBP appears to be applying facial recognition to surveillance camera footage at border crossings and CBP facilities. Since 2024, CBP has awarded nine contracts, including one for almost \$12 million,⁹ to the company **Sentrillion**, which claims to offer CBP officials the ability to use facial recognition from video surveillance systems "to verify the identity of citizens."¹⁰ And CBP already has an almost \$16 million contract with data broker **LexisNexis** for a suite of surveillance tools that include facial recognition.¹¹

At the U.S.-Canada border, CBP is using facial recognition company **Clearview AI** in the Spokane sector to identify people. **Clearview AI**, which recently replaced its former CEO with GOP megadonors and Trump supporters Hal Lambert and Richard Schwartz, was also recently subject to a class action settlement for damages resulting from violations of biometric privacy laws in Illinois.¹²

More spending on biometric surveillance tech is coming. The OBBBA has directed \$673 million in future spending on biometric technology for the country's entry and exit systems, including facial recognition and comparisons, iris scans, DNA collection, and a portal to collect and share biographic and biometric data.

MONITORING OUR SOCIAL MEDIA & OTHER COMMERCIAL DATA SOURCES



ICE is seeking a company to help it monitor up to one million people by scouring social media and other sources of data, like property records and the so-called “dark web.”¹³ The request for “data analytics” support would help ICE screen and vet people, develop leads to analyze criminal activity, and “identify[] potentially criminal and fraudulent behavior before crime and fraud can materialize.”¹⁴

Also, CBP recently obtained access to software tools from **Fivecast Onyx**, a company that claims to “uncover digital footprints, resolve identities, and verify information” by scraping massive amounts of public data from diverse sources, including social media.¹⁵

TRACKING OUR LICENSE PLATES & OTHER VEHICLE-MOUNTED SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS

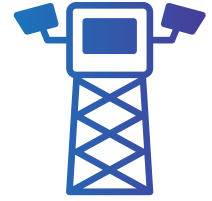


Until 2021, CBP had a contract with **Motorola** to get license plate reader (LPR) camera systems, which can “read” license plate numbers and tie them to specific individuals. Since then, CBP has acquired LPR systems and licenses from **Thundercat Technology**, **Abba Technologies**, and venture capital firm **Black Marlin Ventures**, which got a \$1.5-million contract in September 2024.¹⁶

CBP also has access to other devices which they mount on their vehicles to hack into the infotainment systems of passersby's vehicles. The tech reveals data like contacts and recent calls. The roughly \$18 million being requested includes funding to integrate the systems to Elon Musk's **Starlink** satellite internet, update them for remote operation, and integrate AI for automating detection and tracking.

SURVEILLING US WITH TOWERS

Despite evidence of their ineffectiveness, CBP has hundreds of towers set up along the border, especially in more remote parts, to track who and what crosses it.¹⁷ They're asking for \$138.7 million for next year to set up almost 200 new towers and to fuse data from towers and apply data analysis to track items and people.



By the end of September 2026, the agency expects to have more than 900 of these towers up. Most of these towers are provided under a contract with **Anduril Industries**, a company backed by Trump associates Palmer Luckey, Peter Thiel, Marc Andreessen, and even JD Vance. Another company that provides towers is **Elbit Systems**.

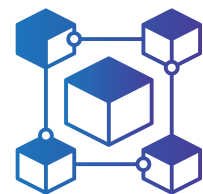
HACKING INTO OUR PHONES

CBP has devices that allow it to search cell phones without access to a password. The software can extract messages, calls, and location data, including deleted data. The seller is **Cellebrite**, a digital intelligence firm co-founded by former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. In 2024, CBP had 40 licenses; in March and April 2025, they renewed at least three licenses.



FUSING GOVERNMENT DATA TO TRACK AND DEPORT COMMUNITY MEMBERS

ICE has given a \$30-million contract to **Palantir Technologies** to build a surveillance platform called ImmigrationOS. Reports suggest it will fuse sensitive personal data from federal agencies like the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) with DHS data.¹⁸ Such a “master database,” if used to target community members for immigration enforcement, would expose residents of the borderlands to more invasive surveillance and could increase raids in border communities. As **Palantir’s** stock price soars, many lawmakers and Trump appointees have profited, raising concerns of potential conflicts of interest.¹⁹



DEPLOYING MILITARY & MILITARY-GRADE SURVEILLANCE TOOLS TO BORDER

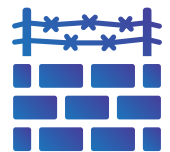


The Pentagon has sent more than 6,000 active-duty combat troops to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, along with military-grade surveillance tech: U-2 spy planes, surveillance drones, helicopters, and Navy warships to surveil the coasts.²⁰ Without Congressional approval, Trump has also given the military jurisdiction over land abutting the border. It started in the spring with two stretches in New Mexico²¹ and Western Texas;²² areas in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas and near Yuma, Arizona were recently added.²³ U.S. troops have begun directly detaining migrants crossing through those areas; so far, more than 1,400 migrants have been criminally charged with military trespass.²⁴ For more, see Appendix, Deployment of Military and Creation of New Military Zones.

Appendix

Beyond the tech, Trump wants to build hundreds more miles of brick-and-mortar walls along the U.S.-Mexico border. The OBBBA gives him \$46.6b or \$51.6b in spending over the next 4 years to build 701 miles of primary wall, 900 miles of river barriers, 629 miles of secondary barriers, and to replace 141 miles of vehicle and pedestrian barriers. This much money could fund universal pre-K for all U.S. children for over a year.²⁵ He also wants to hire more border agents, even though his officials claim border crossings are at a historic low, and 22,000 Border Patrol positions are already authorized.²⁶ And, to keep pace with Stephen Miller's demand to arrest 3,000 immigrants a day, DHS plans to expand its detention capacity from 50,000 people to as many as 150,000.

BUILDING MORE BRICK-AND-MORTAR WALL



The construction of the border wall has been key to Trump's strategy of shaping the public's perception of migrants as criminals and the U.S.-Mexico border as a dangerous place, a strategy he has leveraged to consolidate power beyond immigration enforcement.

In his first administration, Trump forced a government shutdown over wall funding,²⁷ ultimately wresting billions to build or replace more than 400 miles of border wall.²⁸ Since his second administration started, 85 miles of new border wall are being built or in the planning stages, according to border czar Tom Homan. DHS Secretary Kristi Noem has issued numerous waivers of environmental laws to accelerate wall construction.²⁹

One of the companies that stands to benefit is **Fisher Sand & Gravel**. The company, which got a \$1.3 billion contract in Trump's first term to build part of the wall³⁰ got a \$143.7 million contract last fall³¹ and was recently awarded a \$309 million contract to build 27 miles of wall in Arizona.³² This company's board of directors has included such high-profile Trump allies as Steve Bannon and Kris Kobach.³³ And in 2021, the consulting firm of border czar Tom Homan, **Homeland Strategic Consulting LLC**, lobbied for the company in Texas.³⁴ Other companies with CBP contracts for building the border wall are **SLSCO, LTD**, which won a contract last fall, and **Granite Construction Co.**, which recently won a 70 million USD contract to build seven miles of new border wall in Hidalgo County, Texas.³⁵

Reliable evidence shows that walls do not deter migration but rather, increase deaths and serious injuries of people on the move.³⁶ From 1998 to 2000, an average of one person died per day crossing the border.³⁷ In the first four months of 2025, 181 Mexican nationals have died, double the number of deaths from the same period in 2024.³⁸ These barriers also desecrate sacred Indigenous lands,³⁹ and damage vital wildlife habitats.⁴⁰

HIRING EVEN MORE IMMIGRATION POLICE

Even though Trump officials claim that border crossings are at a historic low, they want to hire hundreds more border agents. The basic spending proposal would pay \$613 million for the 22,000 Border Patrol positions that are already authorized.⁴¹ It also gives Trump an extra \$122.9 million to hire 450 more CBP officers for its Office of Field Operations.⁴²



On top of that, the OBBBA gives DHS an extra \$16.2 billion to hire even more immigration police over the next decade, including 10,000 more ICE personnel and 8,000 CBP officers, including 3,000 more border patrol agents.⁴³ It also gives \$2.9 billion to pay bonuses to immigration police. If spent differently, these \$16.2 billion would be almost enough to meet the humanitarian needs of 123 million vulnerable people in 2025, according to the UN World Food Program.⁴⁴

More immigration police in border communities means more people who live and move through the borderlands – particularly Indigenous, Black, and darker-skinned Latinx folks – will be criminalized and surveilled, endure human rights abuses like shootings, sexual abuse, and torture, and suffer injury or even death.⁴⁵

DEPLOYMENT OF MILITARY & CREATION OF NEW MILITARY ZONES



The 6,000 active-duty U.S. military troops and another 3,600 approved to deploy will serve under a new Joint Task Force-Southern Border activated at Fort Huachuca, Arizona.⁴⁶ As of

May, the deployment had cost \$525 million.⁴⁷ The OBBBA steers \$1 billion more to the Department of Defense to provide military support to enforce civil immigration law at the border. And DHS has requested 20,000 National Guard troops to support the mass deportation campaign.⁴⁸

The increasing militarization of the border sends a message not only to those attempting to cross the border, but also to the private contractors with military capabilities that are helping build it. For example, Anduril recently showcased its Ghost-X AI-powered drone—which has a payload capacity of up to 9 kg and has previously been deployed by the U.S. Army in active combat—at a border security exposition in Arizona,⁴⁹ raising concerns about its potential for weaponization at the border.

DETENTION & DEPORTATION

This year, Congress already gave Trump an extra \$500 million to ramp up detention. But ICE has apparently blown through that, prompting conservative lawmakers to castigate them for their “especially egregious” spending methods.⁵⁰ Still, those same lawmakers are proposing to give ICE \$4.4 billion next year for custody operations, to fund the ICE detention system’s existing 50,000 detention beds.⁵¹



On top of that, the OBBBA gives Trump another \$45 billion – 13 times the current annual detention budget – to scale his mass detention plans. And the OBBBA also makes available \$12 billion in grants to states for assistance with detention and removal.

DHS apparently counted on the OBBBA’s provision for detention funding to pass and that the money would be allocated in the near term, as it recently issued a request for services from contractors worth up to \$45 billion over the next two years.⁵² Policy experts estimate this unheard-of funding level could triple the number of ICE detention beds, to 150,000.⁵³

Private prison giants like **GEO Group** and **CoreCivic** have close ties to leadership and are poised to cash in on the boom, as 86 percent of people in ICE custody are confined in detention centers run by private companies.⁵⁴ **GEO Group** gets about \$1 billion, or nearly half its total revenue, from ICE. The company and its affiliates donated more than \$4 million to Trump, his inauguration fund, and Republican leadership.⁵⁵ Attorney General Pam Bondi is a former lobbyist for the company.⁵⁶ Homan also earned fees as a consultant for them.⁵⁷ The CEO of **CoreCivic**, which got more than \$550 million in revenue from ICE in 2022,⁵⁸ has said he expects to see the “most significant growth” in his company’s history over the next several years.⁵⁹

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